

Orange and Union Streets Neighborhood Study
Silvanus Ewer House
19 Union Street
Nantucket
Nantucket County
Massachusetts

HABS No. MASS-1061

HABS
MASS
10-NANT
76F-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

ORANGE AND UNION STREETS NEIGHBORHOOD STUDY
SILVANUS EWER HOUSEHABS
MASS
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Location: 19 Union Street (on west side), Nantucket,
Massachusetts

Present Owner: John F. and Theresa Maury

Present Occupants: Maury family

Present Use: Dwelling

Brief Statement
of Significance:

One of the several typical four-bay Nantucket houses erected here after land below Quaaty Bank was dug away to make room for houses on Union Street; part of the Orange and Union Streets Neighborhood Study (MASS-1014).

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Original and subsequent owners:

- 1803 -- Nathan Nye bought land from Josiah Barker and Jethro Hussey.
- 1805 -- Silvanus Ewer bought from Nathan Nye, house carpenter, "with dwelling thereon".
- 1807 -- Silvanus Ewer, ship owner, bought additional land from William Nichols for \$60, -- land which Nichols had bought from Richard Mitchell in 1805.
- 1836 -- Peter Folger Ewer inherited from his father, Silvanus Ewer.
- 1855 -- Mary C. Ewer inherited from her husband, Peter F. Ewer.
- 1877 -- Margaret F. Coffin inherited from her mother, Mary C. Ewer.
- 1906 -- Mary E. Denham inherited from her mother, Margaret F. Coffin.
- 1909 -- Frank M. Coffin from his sister Mary E. Denham.
- 1926 -- Nora M. Rodriguez from Frank M. Coffin.
- 1951 to date -- John F. and Theresa H. Maury from Nora M. Rodriguez.
(Abstract: Deeds at Registry Deeds, Nantucket, Massachusetts.)

2. Date of erection: c. 1803 (Abstract: Deeds of 1803 and 1805 at Registry Deeds, Nantucket, Massachusetts.)

3. Architect: Unknown. Built by a carpenter.
4. Original plans, construction, etc.: By the end of the eighteenth century it had become the custom to build houses with two stories front and rear and set high on a full basement lighted by windows. There were high front steps and stoops on these buildings. This house had the plan of a Nantucket house of the period.
5. Notes on alterations and additions: An ell was later added to be used as a kitchen with a fireplace, leaving the rooms in the main house available for other purposes. In recent years the rear of the house has been enlarged to make a family room. Quite a few changes have been made to the interior, which however, still shows late eighteenth century influence. The main part of the house is structurally little changed.

B. Historical Events Connected with the Structure:

Nathan Nye, who was a house carpenter, bought the land and built this house, possibly on order from Silvanus Ewer who immediately bought it.

Nathan Nye died in 1807 and his widow Phebe within a month married Silvanus Ewer. She was Silvanus Ewer's third wife, and after her death in 1822 he took still another wife, Eunice Hussey. He died of consumption at the age of sixty-eight. Silvanus Ewer was by trade a ship-carpenter, who at the age of twenty-one moved to Nantucket from Osterville, and being of an industrious and thrifty turn of mind soon accumulated money enough to purchase a part of a whaleship. This vessel made a successful voyage, and thus he was able to extend his interests in the same direction and it was not long before he became a whaling merchant and manufacturer of oil and candles. He accumulated a large property and died wealthy in Nantucket.

Peter F. Ewer inherited this property from Silvanus Ewer, his father. Peter's mother was the second wife, Peggy Folger. Silvanus had no children by the other three wives.

Peter F. Ewer was born in 1800 and married Eunice Cartwright. Their son George Alexander Ewer went to Valparaiso, Chile, where he settled and married a Chilean named Trinidad Nairdel. The "camels" or floating drydocks were invented by Peter Ewer and for a while were successful in taking the loaded whaleships over the shallow water to the "back of the bar". But, though an ingenious and enterprising man, Peter Ewer was not very sagacious as a financier and between 1842 and 1845 he lost nearly all of the property, including the ample fortune left him by his father.

The eight milestones on the road from Nantucket to Siasconset were purchased and set out by him when he was a young man, and

one of his oddities was to leave it as a tradition in his family that his children and children's children to the final generation should keep those milestones painted white. He was a generous man, strongly attached to the island of his birth, always hopeful and at times rather visionary.

(Abstract: Memorial Biographies of the New England Historic Genealogical Society, Volume II, 1853 - 1855, Boston)

Peter F. Ewer's second wife was the sister of his first wife and their son was Dr. Ferdinand C. Ewer who, in 1869 published the well-known map of Nantucket, now generally known as the "Ewer Map". He was for many years Rector of St. Ignatious's Church in New York, was also a civil engineer and something of a geologist and author of several books on theology and science.

This house was owned by the Ewer family from the time it was built soon after 1803 until 1926.

C. Sources of Information:

1. Old Views: Old photograph of Union Street in 106 Views of Nantucket by Jim Robinson, 1911; 1891 photograph of east side of Union Street showing the cobblestones in Rambling Through the Streets and Lanes of Nantucket by Edouard A. Stackpole, 1969; an early view of Union Street from the east in Brief Historical Data by Joseph Ellis Coffee Farnham, 1915.

Prepared by Mrs. Marie M. Coffin
Nantucket, Massachusetts
August 1970

PART II. PROJECT INFORMATION

These records were prepared as part of the Orange and Union Streets Neighborhood Study (MASS-1014) made in the summer of 1970 by the Historic American Buildings Survey on Nantucket, Massachusetts. This is the fifth summer project of a continuing HABS comprehensive survey of the early architecture and urban design of Nantucket financed by a grant from the Nantucket Historical Trust.

The project was under the general supervision of James C. Massey, Chief of the Historic American Buildings Survey. Project Director was Professor F. Blair Reeves, A.I.A., of the University of Florida. Historical information was provided by Mrs. Marie M. Coffin of Nantucket, Massachusetts. Photographs are by Jack E. Boucher of Linwood, New Jersey. The material was edited for deposit in the Library of Congress by Mrs. Constance Werner Ramirez, August 1971.